

CEN briefing note: UK environmental achievements

Climate:

- **In 2019, the Government enshrined net zero into law, making the UK the first major economy to do so.** This set a global standard for other countries to follow; **90%** of the world's economy is now covered by a 2050 net zero target, up from 30% before the UK took on the COP presidency. UK emissions are now **50%** below 1990 levels, while the economy has grown by nearly 80% over the same period, showing economic growth and climate action can go hand in hand.
- **Since 2010, the proportion of our electricity generated by renewables has increased sevenfold.** Nearly half of the UK's electricity in the last quarter of 2023 came from renewables, compared to just 6.8% in 2010. This is partly due to the introduction of Contracts for Difference in 2014, which leverages private investment in renewables by increasing revenue certainty and thereby cutting financing costs for investors. In winter 2022, these renewables saved nearly **£16 billion** worth of expensive gas imports.
- **Despite the UK's relatively small contribution to global emissions, global leadership has spurred international action on climate change.** In 2021, the UK brought together 197 nations for the COP26 UN Climate Summit in Glasgow. **Highlights** included agreements to phase down coal power, accelerate the transition to zero emission cars and vans, and halt deforestation by 2030. If delivered, the summit's announcements could save **9.5 billion** tonnes of carbon emissions.
- **The green economy has grown significantly in recent years, and is now worth more than £74 billion to the UK.** Net zero already supports nearly one million jobs, which pay around **£10,000** more than the national average. It is the fastest-growing sector in the economy, growing **9%** last year and attracting **£20** billion in foreign direct investment. The net zero economy is expected to significantly **benefit** industrial heartland areas of the UK with new investment, local jobs, and economic growth.
- **Policies in the last parliament have bolstered the UK's reputation as a world leader in green finance.** **£31 billion** for low-carbon projects was raised through the government's 'green gilts' programme launched in 2021. The £22 billion funding for the new UK Infrastructure Bank has **already** provided certainty of funding to net zero projects such as wind turbine manufacturing centres, battery storage sites, a reservoir, and public transport programmes, mobilising over **£4.2 billion** of additional private capital so far. The UK's COP26 commitment to create the first net zero-aligned financial centre through the

introduction of mandatory climate transition plans has also helped to de-risk financial investments and reduce the burden on public finances as we move towards net zero.

- **Over a million electric vehicles (EVs) are now on the roads and sales continue to grow, driven by the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Mandate and targeted tax breaks.** The Government's independent advisor on climate change - the Climate Change Committee - calculated that transport emissions, of which **61% are from cars and taxis**, will need to be **cut by over 70%** to keep the UK on track for 2050. Targeted tax breaks for company fleet vehicles has seen the sale of EVs grow and last year **16.5%** of all new vehicle sales were pure battery EVs. The ZEV Mandate will see this proportion continue to increase, giving drivers more choice of make, model and price point as well as de-risking industry investment decisions. Recent investment announcements include over **£4 billion from Tata** to build a new EV battery factory, **£600 million from BMW** to produce electric cars in Oxford, **£1 billion from Nissan** for an EV manufacturing hub, and over **£380 million from Ford** to develop EV components.

Nature:

- **The UK is the first country in the world to set a legal duty to halt the decline of nature by 2030.** The passage of the 2021 Environment Act marked a watershed for legal protections on nature, setting binding targets to improve water quality, tackle air pollution, and reduce waste.
- **The government has supported farming post-Brexit by reforming incentives to improve the natural environment while improving food security.** The flagship Environmental Land Management schemes replaced the wasteful EU Common Agricultural Policy, which paid farmers based on the size of their land rather than how they managed it. ELMs reward farmers financially for providing public goods like cleaner air and water through environmental stewardship. There are now **55,000** agri-environment agreements in place across England.
- **Brexit has enabled the UK to become a global ocean champion.** The Blue Belt Programme supports the UK Overseas territories to protect and sustainably manage their marine environments, which are home to **90%** of the UK's biodiversity and a huge range of unique and endangered species. The programme now covers an area of ocean larger than the size of India. Using post-Brexit freedoms, the UK has also banned environmentally damaging bottom trawling in 13 areas, introduced three highly protected marine areas designed to protect ecosystems and allow them to recover, and banned sandeel fishing to boost Britain's seabird numbers.

- **There remains more to do to improve water quality, but this government has taken more action to clean up our rivers, seas, and waterways than any previous government.** Since 2015, record fines have been imposed on illegally polluting water companies, raising [£141 million](#). The cap on civil penalties (£250,000) for water companies has also been lifted. The revenue from these fines will now be reinvested into restoration projects through a new “water restoration fund”.
- **The government played a critical role in bringing parties together at the COP15 Convention on Biological Diversity summit and the UN high seas summit.** Among the deals it secured were commitments to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, protect 30% of global land and oceans for nature, and safeguard marine biodiversity in waters outside national jurisdictions.